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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: THE NEW IRAQI CONSTITUTION

Drafting Through Differences

1. The privately owned Arabic daily "Al-Watan" featured an editorial on August 10 entitled "Issues Blocking Efforts for Drafting Iraqi Constitution":

"There are many difficult issues and complicated questions facing the drafting committee of the new Iraqi constitution. Conflicting political powers, representatives of religious organizations/groups, and social activists are divided about the fundamental elements in the proposed constitution. These issues include the role of federalism, the Kurdistan border, and the use of Islamic law as the supreme law in interpreting all law and legislation governing Iraq. The Kurds support the idea of a federal system and demand expansion of the Kurdistan border to include the city of Kirkuk. Arab Sunnis refuse the notion of federalism, and Shiites object to the expansion of the Kurdish border. Faced with these and many other competing interests, the drafting committee has an enormous task ahead of them."

Post-Constitution Stability In Iraq

2. "Al-Watan" published on August 14 an editorial entitled "Hanging Question":

"As the Iraqi drafting committee approaches the final edits to the new Iraqi constitution, existing political powers in Baghdad become more irate that their demands regarding the safety and security of Iraq have not been sufficiently covered by the document. Many have expressed deep concern that current conflicts in Iraq threaten to tear apart Iraqi unity and will increase the rate of violence. Also in a time when American and British troops are suffering heavy losses, there is fear that these forces will begin leaving Iraq in droves. There is little confidence that the new Iraqi army will be able to preserve stability and protect the Iraqi people from armed militia and rebel groups such as 'Bader' and 'Bashmarkah.'"

New Constitution, New Opportunity

3. Murtadha Hasan Ali, a member of the State Council, wrote an op-ed in government-owned Arabic daily "Oman" on August 15, entitled "The Iraqi Constitution: An Historic Opportunity for Iraqi leaders":

"Iraq is passing through a period of time that can be characterized as a historical opportunity, especially for those who currently control the fate of Iraq. If Iraqi leaders invest properly in this opportunity and successfully form a modern constitution, it will usher in an era of increased compromise and peace, and a reduction of violence. On the other hand, if there are any delays or disagreements regarding the constitution, then more violence and an increased movement toward violence as a means of control will surely be adopted."

BALTIMORE